THE ART OF KNIFE THROWING

BY FRANK DEAN

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FRANK AND BERNICE DEAN PRESENTING THEIR KNIFE THROWING STUNT, AS DESCRIBED ON PAGE 11.

FOREWORD

FRANK DEAN was born in California and after completing his high school education toured the country with various Circuses, Wild West Shows and Vaudeville Units.

During the 1929 season with Al. G. Barnes he did his knife throwing act and in addition trick riding and fancy roping numbers. Here he worked with two other noted knife throwers, Frank Chicarello and Bennie Pete.

In 1935 his novelty knife throwing was a sensational feature of the entertainment program presented at the Grand Yokohama Exposition in Japan.

Upon his return in 1935 he started the manufacture of throwing knives. This came about owing to the many requests for knives from people witnessing his act. His 10 inch knife gained popularity and continued requests for information on knife throwing prompted the writing of this book.

This book, written by an actual professional knife thrower, experienced both in the throwing and manufacturing of them, offers much to both beginner and expert in its complete coverage of the subject.

Gathering the material called for an exhaustive search extending over a period of years. The fact that knife throwing has never been popular to any extent with any particular tribe or race has led to the gleaning of the greater part of the following information from well known knife throwing entertainers and from experiments conducted by the author.

The few previous works on this art have been very elementary in nature but in compiling this text, every effort has been made to make it complete. To this end a number of original efforts are described and fully explained.

The author will answer all inquires on individual knife throwing problems if a stamped and self addressed envelope is sent with each request. Frank Dean, San Jose, Calif.

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TO EXPLAIN the origin of knife throwing would be in a great part mere guess work, tho no doubt the first people of this earth caused its inception when they shaped and sharpened their throwing stones into crude knives. Then the projectile arms, such as the bow and arrow, catapults, guns, etc., caused throwing to be of much less value, but even today the throwing of weapons is practised to some extent in various parts of the world. South Sea islanders have their throwing clubs, the Australian Aborigines the boomerang, the Eskimos their harpoons, South African natives their assegais, and the much-fictionized knife throwers of both the civilized and savage people, their knives.

Tho an uncommon happening, we know that knives, bolos and machetes have been thrown sucessfully in the killing of game by natives in various parts of the world, but incidents of their being thrown with deadly effect upon human beings are as scarce as the proverbial hen's teeth.

The idea that a throwing knife is valuable as a weapon for self defense or offense, is erroneous, for it is only practical as entertainment!

True, a great many knives are carried as weapons, some by those skilled in the art of throwing them, but rarely, if ever, are they so used.

A SWELL HOBBY

AS A SPORT or pastime, many hours of pleasure can be derived from this fascinating science, and its low cost, both initial outlay and upkeep, plus the fact that it requires but little space for practice, are advantages making it a very desirable hobby.

You will find that it is not strenuous but a good, mild, muscular exercise and in addition, a wonderful training for the eyes.

To begin this pastime, it is necessary to secure a good practice knife, and the fundamental requirement in its construction is sturdiness, for it must be built to withstand hard and rough usage. For this reason the kind of knives available at hardware and sporting goods stores are of little value. Butcher knives as a whole, vibrate and quiver when thrown into a target, and this tendency causes crystalization of the steel which soon results in a broken blade. Hunting knives having a thicker and heavier blade are not apt to break in this manner though their common fault is in the construction of the handles which are seldom made to withstand the rough treatment resulting from their being thrown.

There are knives available for just this purpose and the purchase of these will be found advisable and of small expense. (see inside back cover)

If you care to construct your own blades they can be easily cut or chiseled out of No. 12 or 14 guage sheet iron and then filed smooth.

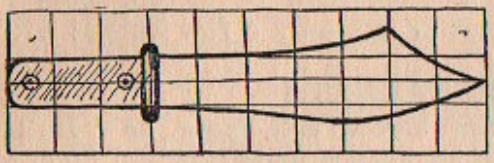
If you intend to have your knives nickel plated no doubt you will find it cheaper to use "auto body" steel as it has no scale to be taken off before applying the plating.

Knives made of these soft metals will last indefinitely and tho they may bend they can be easily straightened with little fear of their breaking.

The handles for the throwing knives should not be made of wood or any other substance liable to break.

Thick pieces of sole leather or composition rubber as used in shoe soles make handles that last well. These should be attached to the knife with solid rivets ⅛" or

more in diameter. The edges of the handles can be rounded up with a file or on an emery wheel.



(Illustration No. 1)

10 INCH — 3-IN-ONE PATTERN

Using only the top half of the pattern and making both sides of the knife the same will give you a diamond pointed blade. Using the other half of the pattern for both sides of a knife will result in a blade of the sticking knife type.

The shape of the knife matters but little; it is the length and the throwing method that count but nevertheless here are three suggested styles. (see illustration No. 1)

TARGETS

FOR A TARGET to practice on, it is possible to use large cardboard boxes filled with sawdust, a bale of hay or straw or a few boards nailed together.

For a more permanent job it is possible to construct a target of straw similar to those used in archery practice or of wood as used by professional knife throwers in their exhibitions. The most popular variety of lumber used in these is No. 1 quality soft grain sugar pine, but owing to its expense it would probably be passed up by the beginners in favor of a cheaper article. Poplar makes a fair substitute more reasonable in price but slightly harder in grain. Cypress also makes a good soft target. These woods are all more or less spongy and when the knives are removed the hole tends to close slightly and seldom chips. Lumber that chips easily will soon wear out.

A great many knife throwers soak their boards with water to soften them. This is easily done by covering the face of the board with wet sacks and repeatedly wetting them. In a few hours the wood will soak up enough moisture to keep it soft for a day or two. When throwing into a wet board the knife points should be wiped off after each throw.

The boards thrown at should be at least two inches in thickness for the knives would soon penetrate any lighter material. It should be remembered that the penetration of a knife does not depend entirely upon the keenness of its blade but is governed more by its weight and by the force with which it is thrown.

If two targets are made and the knives thrown from one to the other a great many steps will be saved. This is especially true if the thrower has only a few knives with which to practice.

SPOT TARGETS

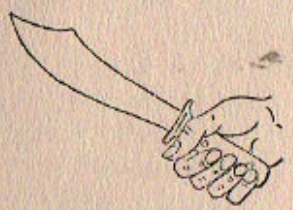
SOME PERFORMERS throw at spots or "Bull's Eyes", painted on the backstops usually when demonstrating trick throws. Occasionally the spot targets are small and of the swinging or pendulum type made of two inch soft pine approximately one foot square having a rope or wooden arm by which it is swung from the assistant's hand. Bennie Pete, a California artist is very adept at this, being able to stick his knife in the "Bull's Eye" every time from a distance of twelve feet. Another effect is to strap the small traget over the assistant's chest.

In a recent short subject for M. G. M. the author and Jack Cavanaugh were called upon to do a number of very unusual stunts.

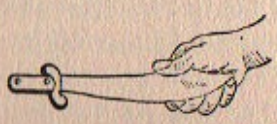
The script called for a "duel" between the knife throwers and each was equipped with a wooden shield target into which his adversary's blades were to stick. During the filming of this a girl had to dance back and forth between the combatants with the knives just missing her head!

KNIFE THROWING ENTERTAINERS

THE KNIVES used by performers always turn end over end in flight and are designed solely for entertainment.



(Illustration No. 2)

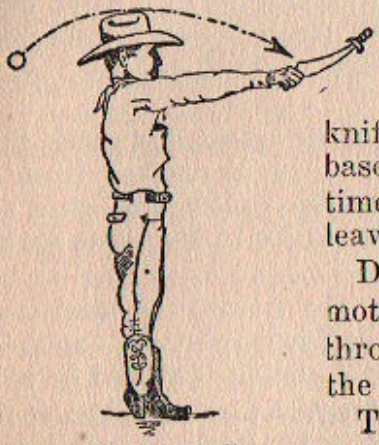


(Illustration No. 3)

They vary in length, shape and weight and partly on this account and the difference in individual throwing habits, there is no standard measured distance from which the knives are thrown. This is true even tho the majority of professional knife throwers in their exhibitions use a distance of three end for end turns of the knife!

There are two methods of throwing used by these "Im-

palement Artists" as they are called. One is by the handle as a knife is ordinarily held, the other, by the point of the blades being gripped between the thumb and closed forefinger. The blade should be held in a position parallel with the forearm when grasped in either manner. (see illustration No. 2 and No. 3)



(Illustration No. 4)

To throw the knife, assume a position, say about five feet away from the target and throw the knife overhand as you would a baseball, observing just how many times it turns end for end after leaving your hand.

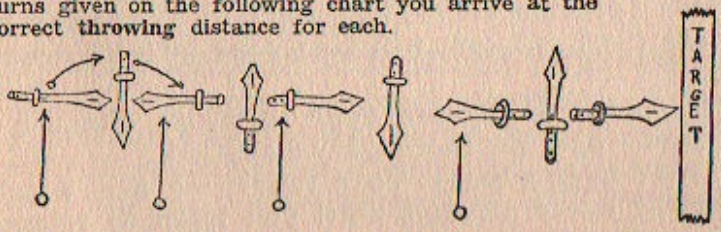
Do not try to impart a spinning motion with the wrist, for the throwing action should come thru the shoulder and elbow.

The reason for counting the number of times the knife turns is to ascertain the least possible distance you can stand from the object at which you are throwing.

If you are holding the knife by the handle your least distance will be two end for end turns and when thrown by the blade it will be one end for end turn. By a few experimental throws you will find the proper distance for this result.

If when holding the knife by the handle, it turns end for end twice and sticks in your target from a distance of five feet, this distance minus the length of your arm

By adding the length of your arm to the different turns given on the following chart you arrive at the correct throwing distance for each.



2 turns	1½ turns	1 turn	½ turn
Handle	Point	Handle	Point
Throw	Throw	Throw	Throw